United Nations E/CN.6/2010/10

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
1 March 2010

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-fourth session
1-12 March 2010
Item 3 (c) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": gender mainstreaming, situations and programmatic matters

Letter dated 23 February 2010 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I write to you today regarding a matter of acute concern to the delegation of Palestine in connection with the recent report you have submitted to the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women entitled "Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women" (E/CN.6/2010/4). We would like to express our appreciation for the submission of this report, which we consider very important, especially given the continued perpetration of serious human rights violations by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian civilian population, including Palestinian women, and the consequent deterioration of their socio-economic conditions on the ground.

However, having said the above, we wish to put on record that over the past years, the delegation of Palestine has been deeply concerned by misrepresentations and a troubling trend in several reports issued by the United Nations, including some issued by the Secretary-General, that have had the effect of distorting the context of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. In this regard, there has been a tendency in several reports, including the report presented to the Commission on the Status of Women both in previous sessions and in the current session, to portray the prevailing situation as more of a conflict between two equal sides — the Israeli and the Palestinian — rather than actually one of a foreign military occupation, wherein there is an occupying Power, bound by clear obligations under international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, and an occupied people, whose most basic and inalienable human rights are being systematically, deliberately and gravely violated and who are entitled to protection under international law.

* E/CN.6/2010/1.

10-25393 (E) 030310

Please recycle

We wish to stress that any examination of the situation and developments in this regard must be considered within the overall context of the occupation, which unquestionably impacts all aspects of the situation on the ground and of the humanitarian and socio-economic conditions of the Palestinian population under occupation and remains the root cause of this conflict. The continuation of reporting, including certain language usage, that overlooks the existence of this occupation and evades even the mentioning of the word "occupation", which is a prevalent pattern in the report, is unacceptable.

In this regard, in the Commission on the Status of Women report specifically, we noticed that throughout the report, especially in section II, which provides a description of the situation, "Israel" has been removed from nearly every instance when describing violations and events on the ground, creating confusion as to who in fact is committing the crimes against the Palestinian side. In this regard, ambiguity arises on whether it was the Israeli or the Palestinian side that committed certain criminal actions, such as the destruction and damage to Palestinian homes, health-care centres, schools, including United Nations schools, which were not even mentioned in this report, and other vital civilian infrastructure during Israel's military aggression against Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009. Nor does the report state that it is "Israel" which is the party harassing the Palestinian people at its more than 600 checkpoints in the occupied West Bank. It instead mentions Israel by name only to offer praise regarding so-called measures to "ease" restrictions of movement in certain places in the West Bank, in which it is further assumed that such measures "are expected to have a significant impact on the freedom of movement and economic development of the Palestinians ...". This clearly has not been, and is not, the case, and this only adds to the misrepresentation of the reality on the ground.

Moreover, we are deeply troubled by the choice of terminology that appears to devalue the lives of Palestinians by making the deaths on the Palestinian side seem less important or serious. For example, a sentence in paragraph 7 of the report states, "... an estimated 1,300 Palestinians lost their lives and 5,300 were injured in the conflict", and in the same sentence, in reference to Israeli deaths, states, "... and 14 Israelis were killed, and more than 530 injured". The choice of terminology to report deaths on the Palestinian side as "lost their lives" and for the Israeli side as "were killed" may imply to the reader that the loss of life of the 1,300 Palestinians was simply a result of their own doing without attributing these deaths to a specific action such as killing or military aggression or violence, while it is clearly implied that those on the Israeli side were killed intentionally by the Palestinian side. (It is also important to note that nearly half of those killed on the Israeli side during this period were occupying forces killed by "friendly fire".)

This point seems even more distressing because the language used to detail so-called "honour killings", for which the report states that figures are not available, is that these killings "should be strongly condemned. Perpetrators of all forms of violence against women should be prosecuted, and any climate of impunity surrounding such offences should be eliminated". While we fully concur with this statement, we find it disconcerting that the reporting on the deliberate criminal policies and actions of Israel, the occupying Power, and the magnitude of its violations against the Palestinian people, which also include war crimes, never utilizes the same strong and appropriate terminology.

In light of the above and in light of the actual facts and the reality of the situation on the ground, we believe it is imperative that this trend of distorting the situation on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the failure to place the situation in the context of occupation in reports by the United Nations, including those of the Secretary-General, must be rectified and corrected in future reports.

We would like to kindly request that the present letter be distributed as a document of the Commission on the Status of Women in order to publicly place our concerns and position regarding the current report of the Commission on record.

(*Signed*) Riyad **Mansour**
Ambassador
Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations